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CounterPoint Brief: Hamas Names Yahya Sinwar as New Leader

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(New York, N.Y.) – Yesterday, August 6, Hamas named Yahya Sinwar as the new leader of its political bureau. Previously Hamas's leader inside the Gaza Strip since 2017, Sinwar will now assume overall leadership of the terrorist organization. Israeli authorities reportedly believe that Sinwar has been hiding inside Gaza's extensive tunnel network since the Hamas-led October 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel, which killed 1,200 men, women, and children. Sinwar was a chief architect of the October 7 attack and is now Israel's "most-wanted" individual following the killings last month of previous Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and Mohammed Deif, the leader of Hamas's armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and orchestrator of numerous Hamas suicide bombings and rocket attacks.

Expert Analysis:

CEP Senior Director Dr. Hans-Jakob Schindler

"With the choice of Yahya Sinwar as the new overall leader of Hamas, the terror group has formally confirmed a shift in the internal power balance that had already occurred after the pogrom-like terror attack of October 7, 2023. With that attack, the internal leadership of Hamas in Gaza had taken over the actual reins of power within the terror group. Over the past 10 months, it was always the internal leadership, particularly Yahya Sinwar, that controlled the hostage negotiations, rejecting deal after deal to ensure his and the group's survival as a terror threat in Gaza. The external leadership will still control a significant part of the group's assets stored securely outside Gaza, including in the Gulf, Lebanon, and Turkey. However, this is unlikely to translate into actual influence over the future direction of the terror organization.

The appointment of Yahya Sinwar also ends the false distinction that Hamas had attempted to establish between internal leaders focused on terrorism and fighting and external leaders focused on negotiations. With this choice, the group clearly focuses its overall branding on its terrorist structure and activities. Therefore, the choice of Yahya Sinwar should encourage those governments that have not yet classified Hamas as a terrorist group to reevaluate their stance and finally

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CEP Chief Executive Officer Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

“Despite a belief in some quarters that the group can somehow be “reasoned with,” plainly Hamas has no intention of tempering its murderous proclivities at all —having chosen one of the most consistently violent individuals to lead the organization and the man responsible for the bloodiest assault on Jews since the Holocaust. As the founder of Hamas’s notorious Majd intelligence unit, Sinwar also bears responsibility for the executions of Palestinians allegedly colluding with Israel—acts that resulted in decades of incarceration in Israel from 1989 until his release in the 2011 prisoner swap for captive soldier Gilad Shalt. Indeed, Sinwar’s brutality against many of his own people in Gaza—against so-called collaborators and also political rivals during the 2007 Hamas-Fatah conflict—approaches his monomaniacal hatred for Israel and Jews.

Despite now being fully commanded by Sinwar, who was individually sanctioned by the United Kingdom and the European Union in the wake of the October 7 atrocities, Hamas will continue to receive enormous financial and political support from its long-time Turkish and Qatari state patrons. With his appointment, the community of responsible nations has a clear opportunity to demand Ankara and Doha cease this reprehensible largesse.”

CEP Resources:

To read CEPs report on Yahya Sinwar, click here.

To read CEP’s report on former Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, click here.

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